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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP, EAP/BCLTV, DRL; HQ USPACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: PREL PHUM BM TH BURMA

SUBJECT: THAI READOUT ON PM THAKSIN MEETING WITH SPDC

CHAIRMAN THAN SHWE

REF: A. RANGOON 1569

1B. E-MAIL O/I EAP/BCLTV-EMBASSY BANGKOK

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Clarke. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. In public remarks about his December 9 meeting in Rangoon with SPDC Chairman Than Shwe and other Burmese leaders, PM Thaksin said that he found "reasonable and convincing" their assessment of the challenges they face from ethnic minorities, and seemed to imply that he also accepted their explanation of why they continue to keep NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) under house arrest. MFA official Damrong Kraikruan, who took notes in the PM's meeting, told us that he doubted that Thaksin intended to leave such an impression about ASSK's continued detention. Damrong's readout of the Thaksin-Than Shwe discussion emphasized that Thaksin had raised ASSK's detention and was firm in delivering the international community's message that the SPDC must move towards dialogue and "real democracy." Thaksin reportedly engaged the Burmese in a general discussion about democracy, and was told that the SPDC would pursue its Road Map. End Summary.

THAKSIN'S RADIO ADDRESS ON HIS VISIT TO BURMA

¶12. (SBU) PM Thaksin used part of his regular December 11 radio address to comment on his meeting two days before in Rangoon with SPDC Chairman Than Shwe and other Burmese leaders (see para 10 below for text). He spoke extemporaneously, recounting that he told the Burmese he did not want to interfere in their domestic affairs, but also stating that he had conveyed concerns of Western democratic countries about Burma's need to shift to a democratic path. After summarizing part of the Burmese response, Thaksin noted that he asked about ASSK's detention and then paraphrased responses by Than Shwe and Vice Chairman Maung Aye claiming that "chaos" had followed her previous releases and stressing that the SPDC faced dangerous threats to Burma's national unity from numerous "ethnic minorities." Thaksin, claiming his own experience with "these movements," said he found the Burmese reasoning both "reasonable and convincing," a statement which many interpreted as "endorsing" the SPDC leadership's explanation of its decision to extend ASSK's house arrest. That was certainly the interpretation put on Thaksin's remarks by the English-language Bangkok Post newspaper, which ran a December 12 front-page article claiming that Thaksin had said he "found Burma's reasons for keeping opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi under house arrest convincing." (Note: Thaksin did not make a direct statement along these lines in his remarks. End Note.)

MFA OFFICIAL PROVIDES CONFIDENTIAL READOUT ON THAKSIN-TANH SHWE MEETING

¶13. (C) MFA official Damrong Kraikruan, the only Thai official besides PM Thaksin and FM Surakiart to sit in (as notetaker) on the Rangoon meeting with Than Shwe and other SPDC leaders, gave Polcouns a readout on December 13. Asked about the Prime Minister's radio address and the Bangkok Post article, Damrong claimed that Thaksin had been roughly relating the assessment by both Than Shwe and Maung Aye of the dangers they felt they faced from ethnic minorities. He said that Thaksin had indeed been impressed by the passion and sincerity with which both top SPDC leaders had repeatedly made this argument. Damrong added that, in his view, the Prime Minister was endorsing only that part of the SPDC "reasoning" and that it was a misinterpretation of his remarks to claim that he was also agreeing that ASSK's continued house arrest was justified.

¶14. (C) Asked for specifics on the exchanges, Damrong said that Thaksin had raised ASSK's detention and that Than Shwe, speaking in Burmese, had complained that ASSK never compromised and said that, as a politician, one should know that it was "impossible to work with her." Damrong said that Than Shwe had then launched into an argument (reportedly repeated 3 times) -- and joined vigorously by Maung Aye -- that Burma was tired of the "chaos" that followed each of ASSK's previous releases as Burma's many ethnic minorities who want to "separate" from Burma tried to take advantage of opportunities presented. Than Shwe and Maung Aye said, according to Damrong, that the SPDC had to keep Burma united

and prevent it from being torn apart by the ethnic minorities.

**15.** (C) Damrong said that PM Thaksin had also tried to engage Than Shwe on the need for democratization and, in a situation of "globalization," the need for Burma to listen to the rest of the world and to explain its actions, "or nobody will understand." Damrong said that Thaksin spoke of the international community's call for genuine political dialogue and reconciliation, and said that it should not be ignored. He also told the Burmese that Thailand was ready to assist "if Myanmar (Burma) is open about the process." Damrong said that a specific "Bangkok Process" meeting was not mentioned.

**16.** (C) Damrong said that Thaksin had noted that, in order to obtain the confidence of the international community, Burma did not have to stick to a particular form of democracy as "democracy comes in many forms." The Prime Minister had added, Damrong said, that the important thing was that the form was "really democratic." Pressed on what Than Shwe and Maung Aye said in response, Damrong said they seemed to agree with the point but said they intended to move forward on their Road Map, including reconvening the National Convention in February, 2005. They claimed to have invited ASSK and the National League for Democracy (NLD) to participate, despite her "denials." (Note: Per Embassy Rangoon, ASSK actually refused to participate in the May 2004 National Convention on SPDC terms, and has not been invited to the upcoming National Convention. End Note.) Damrong said that the Burmese leaders had even claimed they were "building democracy," although he noted that Than Shwe had twice used the term "guided democracy."

**17.** (C) Asked for Thai conclusions about the results of the Thaksin-Than Shwe meeting, Damrong said that the Thai Prime Minister had "delivered the international community's message," but he (Damrong) felt that the main Burmese response was negative: "(Rangoon) has no willingness to free ASSK." They will go ahead with the Road Map. He said that the discussion on bilateral issues was "mixed." However, Maung Aye, who Damrong confirmed was "unusually talkative, perhaps reflecting a new status in the top leadership," had been enthusiastic about increasing tourism. The Burmese had also agreed that constructing the road through Burma from Thailand to India should continue. Thaksin, Damrong said, had sought tighter Burmese measures against drugs and had been pleased that Than Shwe and Maung Aye both said they were trying to be responsive to his request for arrest of two specific drug figures. Damrong said that Thaksin had mentioned in passing to Than Shwe that Thailand hoped to see resumption of the SPDC-KNU negotiations, and had discussed this subject in more depth with PM Soe Win.

**18.** (SBU) Damrong said that the Burmese side in this meeting had started out larger but was cut down to the "top five" SPDC leaders, including Than Shwe, Maung Aye, Soe Win, Secretary 1 Thein Sein, and General Thura Shwe Mann. PM

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Thaksin had limited the Thai participants to three: himself, FM Surakiart, and Damrong as notetaker.

**19.** (C) Comment: PM Thaksin and FM Surakiart, the architects of Thai policy towards Burma, continue to try to keep a balance between their "constructive engagement" approach to Rangoon -- which they see as the best means to resolve unique Thai-Burmese cross-border problems -- and their desire for credibility with the U.S. and other countries concerned about SPDC repression. During Ambassador Johnson's December 8 farewell call on FM Surakiart, the Foreign Minister went out of his way to preview that Thaksin would raise "hard issues" with Than Shwe, including the release of ASSK and political dialogue and democratization issues. By all accounts, the Thais believe that Thaksin did, in Damrong's phrase, "deliver the international community's message." But it also comes through in the accounts of Thai diplomats in Rangoon (Ref A) and that of Damrong that Thaksin's exchanges with the SPDC were not as forceful and we would have liked. End Comment.

TEXT OF PM THAKSIN'S BURMA COMMENTS IN HIS DECEMBER 11 RADIO ADDRESS

**110.** (U) Text source is a Thai language text provided by the Public Relations Department, Office of the Prime Minister, from a tape of the address. Translation from the Thai language by Embassy Bangkok. Begin Text:

"On Thursday, December 9, I traveled to Myanmar (Burma) to attend the Fourth World Buddhist Summit in Rangoon. The Laotian Prime Minister also attended. I arrived there at 0800 hours and departed at 1430 hours on the same day.

I had discussions with Burmese leaders. I met with Senior General Than Shwe, Chairman of the SPDC. Vice Senior General Maung Aye was also present, together with Prime Minister Lt. General Soe Win, Lt. General Thein Sein, and other SPDC officials, who attended the meeting briefly.

Foreign Minister Surakiart joined me in the talks. Our discussion was a good, sincere, and straight-forward exchange on many issues.

I opened the discussion by telling them that, since we (Thailand and Burma) are neighbors, and if you are confident in my sincerity toward the Burmese people and the Government of Burma over the past four years, I urge you to talk about all topics in a straight-forward manner. I have the etiquette not to intervene in your domestic matters. But I am expected by international community to push the Government of Burma for a shift to a path towards democracy at the soonest moment. I thus have to do this properly. While I will not interfere in your domestic matters, at the same time I must convey the concerns of Western democratic countries for you to hear, so that you will consider what you should or should not do.

The subsequent exchange was sincere on many issues. I am able to recount some of what was discussed, but not everything.

The Burmese insist, first, that they will not retreat. Second, they said they are moving ahead on the seven proposals in their Road Map towards democracy, as they have outlined them. They will hold the Second National Council Convention in February. Moreover, they informed me that they had invited Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) to participate, but ASSK subsequently denied having ever been invited. (Embassy Note: As in para 6 above, this appears to be a reference to ASSK's refusal to participate in the May 2004 National Convention on SPDC terms, and not to any invitation to the planned February National Council Convention. PM Thaksin and the Thai MFA apparently did not catch the nuances. End Note.)

I then asked them about the continued detention of ASSK. They said ASSK was released three times. But whenever she was released, the country fell into chaos. They said that one should feel sympathy for Burma. They said their country has over 130 minority groups, with some areas having as many as 33 ethnic groups living in them. If order (i.e. security) is not properly set up in advance, they believe that the leaders of these many ethnic groups will declare themselves to be president or other title of leadership, leading to a breakup of Burma. Burma, in their view, will be disorderly, with nothing left of unity. Thus, their goal is to maintain respect for the integrity of Burma.

This is their reasoning, which is reasonable and convincing (to me) since I am familiar with many aspects of these movements. The Burmese have been making many efforts. So, we (Thailand) try to push for the soonest reconciliation. In our view, when our neighbor has peace and prosperity, Thailand will also have peace. If they can't achieve it, Thailand is impacted by their problems.

For example, we now have over one million Burmese migrant workers in Thailand, a matter on which Burma has cooperated well.

I also talked over other issues in the bilateral relationship. One topic was tourism, an area in which the Burmese are willing to welcome our investment and development. A second was the highway connecting Thailand, Burma, and India, which they are willing to continue to work on. Third is the Burmese workers in Thailand. They are willing to send their officials here to prove the citizenship of those workers in order for issuance of legal documents for them, which would allow the workers to continue at their jobs for another period of time. Eventually, a Burmese worker quota will be introduced.

We also discussed narcotics suppression, an issue on which they have cooperated well over the past two years, and will continue to do so. I asked them specifically about two bad men living in Burma named Bang Ron and Wei Sei Kang. The Burmese said they have already ordered their regional commanders to look into this matter. If the two men are found to be living in Burma, they will get them. So these two guys have to find a new place to live.

End text.

¶11. (U) This message has been reviewed by Embassy Rangoon.  
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